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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
TUESDAY, APRIL 8, 2008

In Today's Papers

The Aftermath of Student Clashes at Akdeniz University
Hurriyet, Milliyet, Vatan, Sabah, Radikal, Taraf, Cumhuriyet, Yeni Safak and others continue reporting on the aftermath of the clashes between students at Akdeniz (Mediterranean) University over the weekend, which intensified when two people opened fire. The gunmen were identified as Omer Ulusoy (34) and Tahir Kara (19). Both were supporters of the opposition right-wing MHP party. Kara was captured but Ulusoy escaped and is still at large. Ulusoy has a police record that includes drug smuggling, blackmail, molestation, and assault.

Mainstream Vatan says nationalists raided the university campus when two students from Yalova (near Istanbul) were beaten up by students from southeastern Turkey on March 7. Vatan says, "Nationalist students raided the campus in revenge." Mainstream Sabah reports right-wing MHP leader Devlet Bahceli fired all the employees at Antalya's MHP branch when it was learned that Ulusoy frequently visited the party headquarters. Akdeniz University Rector Professor Mustafa Akaydin expressed concern that the escalation of violence in universities might trigger a new military takeover similar to that in 1980. All papers point to the "dangerous signals" coming from universities, recalling the terrible events that led to the 1980 military coup began with clashes like these at universities.

Editorial Commentary on Unrest in Universities

"Those Notorious Figures Are Back"

Okay Gonensin wrote in mainstream Vatan (4/8): "This same kind of game has been played twice before. First, in 1971 Turkey was seized by student clashes, which ended in a military coup on March 12. The second plot was staged once again and ended in a horrible massacre. Unfortunately, Turkey could not understand the trap that was the September 12, 1980 military coup. These games were staged by the same notorious players; and we had the same political parties in both cases. It is hard to tell whether Turkey will fall into a

similar trap for the third time. If common sense is replaced by emotions, and if hate overshadows other feelings, Turkey may be dragged into a vicious cycle. Beware, for this game has just started. Erdogan, Baykal and Bahceli, have a very important responsibility to not allow the Turkish people to fall into the same trap again."

"Alarming Signals From Universities"

Fikret Bila wrote in mainstream Milliyet (4/8): "Turkey has gone through enough experience to take a lesson from of ideological polarizations. People once killed each other based on being on the left or right, or being revolutionary or nationalist. Recent clashes in universities are somehow different than previous polarizations. What we see this time is a polarized society based on 'Turkish and Kurdish' and 'secular and anti-secular.' The impact of this polarization emerged in universities because young people are open to provocations due to hyper emotions and excitements. Turkish political institutions must take these alarming signals coming from universities very seriously. They must not repeat the mistakes that were made on the eve of September 12, 1980 coup."

"The Seeds of Provocations"

Tamer Korkmaz wrote in Islamist-leaning Yeni Safak (4/8): "While the AKP faces a court case for closure, Turkey is witnessing efforts to create chaos. The dark players of the 'destabilizing Turkey' game are back on the stage as we see a replica of events like those prior to the September 12, 1980 coup. University clashes and bomb attempts by children bombers speak of nothing but provocation. Even before the July 2007 general elections, several attempts to create a chaotic situation in the country failed. None of them worked. And the current efforts are also doomed to fail."

The AKP Board's New Roadmap

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All papers report on Monday, the AKP party board met with Prime Minister Erdogan to draw a "roadmap" to follow during its party closure hearings. Papers comment the AKP will first present a "democratization package" to parliament, which reportedly includes changes to Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code. Mainstream Aksam says, "The government has turned its face toward the EU." Mainstream Sabah writes, "The AKP will prioritize EU-related reforms and will seek compromise with the opposition regarding their endeavors to change the constitution." Namely, Sabah notes, the AKP "will try to reach an agreement with opposition parties regarding constitutional changes to make the closure of political parties more difficult."

Meanwhile, in "The Need for Compromise Is Remembered When the AKP Faces a Closure Suit," leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet calls the AKP's closure suit, "a reminder that the AKP needs to seek compromise." Murat Yetkin of liberal Radikal writes, "Erdogan understands that fierce debates harm his government, his party, and his country," and "he must take steps in line with his messages of compromise and cooperation." Bilal Cetin of mainstream Vatan writes, "The AKP has dropped the idea of a public referendum on constitutional changes because of fears a referendum would lead to more tensions and intensified polarization."

Suggested Changes to Article 301 Politicize the Presidency

All papers report the AKP proposed a bill on Monday to amend Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, which makes it a crime to "insult Turkishness." The bill requires prosecutors to receive approval from the president before they can charge someone for violating that section of the law. It also reduces the sentence from three to two years, and suspends the prison terms of those convicted of violating Article 301. Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet writes, "The AKP government has shifted the responsibility for dealing with Article 301 to President Abdullah Gul." Mainstream Milliyet writes, "Finally, the government has taken the expected step for boosting Turkey's EU bid." Liberal Radikal is disappointed with the proposal because it "politicizes the presidency" and "the essence of Article 301 remains the same."

TGS Compiles List of Pro-U.S. and Pro-EU Journalists, Academics, and Professionals

Liberal Radikal reports the military General Staff (TGS) compiled a list of "NGOs with ties to the U.S. and the EU," that included, "journalists, authors, businesspeople, and academics in order to compile their attitudes towards the EU and the U.S."

Photograph Used by AKP Women's Branch Mistakes Armenian Woman for a Turk

Nationalist Ortadogu and liberal Radikal report that over the weekend, the ruling AKP women's branch gave a power-point presentation during a party meeting on the hardships Turkish women faced before the modern Turkish Republic was founded. The subject of photograph used in the presentation was mistakenly described as a Turkish woman. The picture was taken by Lieutenant Armin Wegner of the Ottoman Army, whose photographs have been widely used to support claims of an Armenian genocide at the hands of Ottomans during World War I, says Radikal. The woman in the photo is actually an Armenian woman carrying her baby while crossing a Syrian desert on foot during the forced exile of Armenians in 1915-16.

TV News:
CNN Turk

Domestic News

- Pro-Kurdish DTP leader Nurettin Demirtas is interrogated in

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connection to three separate lawsuits for making terror propaganda.

- Istanbul Governor Muammer Guler said they were probing news reports about students wearing headscarves at a private high school in Istanbul.

- EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso and EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn will visit Turkey on April 10.

International News

- European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said Turkey has to convince the EU that it is still interested in EU accession.

- Aides to radical Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr said the Mahdi Army would be disbanded if senior religious leaders ordered it.

WILSON